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Fred Bervoets

Paintings & Works on Paper from the Stéphane Janssen Collection

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rodolphe janssen is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition at the gallery of Belgian artist Fred Bervoets (b. 1942 in Antwerp, Belgium. Lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium), which will take place from September 7th to October 14th, 2023. Fred Bervoets: *Paintings & Works on Paper from the Stéphane Janssen Collection* celebrates the recent donation of a significant body of work from the Stéphane Janssen collection to the KMSKA, Antwerp, Belgium and the S.M.A.K., Ghent, Belgium.

Stéphane Janssen was Fred Bervoets's first dealer from 1967-70. In the following decade and for the next thirty years, he became one of his main collectors and a fervent advocate of his work. In addition to exhibitions organized in Europe, Stéphane Janssen introduced his work in the United States in the late 1980s. Several major shows followed, including *A Museum in the Making* in 1994 at the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, Scottsdale, AZ USA, which featured a dialogue between his works and those of the American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat.

The present exhibition is designed around a monumental painting from the 1980s, *Zelfportret als kabouter* (Self portrait As A Munchkin), which refers to the figure of the dwarf. The expressionist scene frames a panoramic view of a city bordered by water, where various sketches of buildings, sometimes sprinkled with a face, intertwine with myriad anthropomorphic figures of disproportionate dimensions. They spring like conquerors besieging a city in turmoil, joined by diverse parallel scenes, ultimately resulting in a painting of great narrative complexity with undeniable theatrical dimensions.

This large work is accompanied by a selection of gouaches on paper and paintings dating from the end of the sixties depicting various scenes with puzzling perspectives, such as spaghetti or sausage eaters swallowing their meals; another one portrays a soldier brandishing his flamethrower; a little further in the room, a cosmonaut floats above a giant matchbox, and elsewhere a more abstract painting depicts gut-like forms wrapping themselves around fluid and moving shapes, crossing two brick walls.

About the artist:

Fred Bervoets (b. 1942 in Antwerp. Lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium)

Fred Bervoets is a Belgian painter, the founder of a so-called Antwerp style of painting, often linked to the German Neue Wilde, the neo-expressive movement in the 1980s. He spends his youth amidst the industrial smoke of Zwiendrecht's port near Antwerp, growing up during and in the aftermath of World War II. Characterised by numerous thematic and stylistic periods, Bervoets' oeuvre draws from a vast register of references, marked by the particular context that surrounded his youth; rising artistic movements; painters such as Pieter Bruegel, Vincent Van Gogh or James Ensor; as well as specific milestones or minor events in his life and the lives of a whole generation.

Influenced by the Cobra movement in his early works from the late 1960s, Fred Bervoets soon introduces snakes and gut-like figures in his paintings, portrayed in highly expressive scenes. Those motifs prefigure his renowned Spaghetti series from the early 1970s, large-scale and intensely narrative canvases depicted in psychedelic atmospheres. In the following years, Fred Bervoets develops a particular interest in etching. First as a side activity, he begins mixing techniques, combining dry needle etching with painting with nitric acid. Bervoets' subsequent works reveal emotions marked by the loss of his painter friend Jan Cox in 1980. From 1987 on, his paintings start to take the form of mutilated self-portraits, creating works with autobiographical references and complex anecdotes that are more alienating than narrative. Parallel to his career as a painter, he is a long-standing teacher at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. His rampant imagination, astute knowledge, enthusiasm, and vitality make him a profoundly appreciated teacher and a father to a whole generation of artists.

Major exhibitions include *A Museum in the Making*, a duo show with Jean-Michel Basquiat at the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, Scottsdale, AZ USA; *Sanguine. Luc Tuymans on Baroque* organised at the M HKA, Antwerpen, Belgium, and *Fondazione Prada*, Milan, Italy. He also participated in the 17th Biennale of São Paulo. His work is included in major public collections such as the S.M.A.K., Ghent, Belgium; KMSKA, Antwerp, Belgium, M KHA, Antwerp, Belgium; and *Mu Zee*, Ostende, Belgium, *Museum De Reede*, Antwerp, Belgium, among others. Since 1969, he has been represented by the gallery *De Zwarte Panter* Antwerp, Belgium.